

NOT SO DOUBTING THOMAS

by John Logan

Do you ever worry about your reputation? The honest truth is that we all do. As a child I remember my mother telling me that we couldn't possibly hang the washing out on a Sunday, 'what would the neighbours think?' she would tell me, 'what sort of a reputation would we get?'. If we are honest we all worry about our reputation in some way or another. There's lots of talk about people using conference packages like zoom or skype at the moment and lots of laughs about the fact that people are often smartly dressed in the top half and wearing their PJ bottoms below the camera. Think about what you are wearing at the moment. Would you normally wear that to church? And yet here we are!!! I can't wait to see what new fashions have emerged from our lockdown lifestyle! I wonder what reputations we will have gained!

I feel sorry for Thomas and his reputation. Peter denied Jesus three times, but we don't call him Peter the Denier, James and John badgered Jesus for a place next to him in heaven, but they didn't get labelled 'the pushy ones'. But Thomas' only crime is that he wasn't there at the time when Jesus appeared to the others and for that he has been labelled 'Doubting Thomas'! Let's be honest, it isn't in the least surprising that Thomas did not believe the disciple's story at first. They had watched Jesus die a cruel and horrific death and for Thomas, the idea that Jesus was now alive was completely unfathomable. Perhaps we should rename him Thomas 'the realist', or Thomas 'the Seeker' or even Thomas 'the hopeful', but 'doubter' seems a little unfair to me. Let's ponder that a little further.

There is a great deal we can learn from Thomas:

- 1.** Thomas 'the Realist' teaches us to be practical in our faith, to be real, to be realistic. It is too easy for us to get carried away with our pious platitudes and religious rhetoric, which are so often meaningless to so many people facing difficult times. Thomas wanted to see for himself, to touch the wounds. Thomas wanted proof! There is nothing wrong with that! Thomas encourages us to 'get real'!
- 2.** Thomas 'the Seeker' encourages us to see for ourselves, to search and to find Jesus for ourselves. He wanted to see for himself and this desire was rewarded when Jesus appeared to him. He was a practical man, a tradesman who need to know for himself.
- 3.** Thomas 'the Hopeful'. There was no doubting that when Thomas saw and touched Jesus he was convinced. 'My Lord and my God' he exclaimed. Legend has it that Thomas travelled further than the other disciples spreading the good news of the risen Christ. We are told that he travelled to the coast of Kerala in India and was martyred in Myalpur, near Madras in AD 72.

Thomas had a story to tell and he told it! Thomas was all these things; realist, seeker, hopeful, but it is also true that he did doubt, albeit momentarily. There was and is nothing wrong with that! Doubting is a healthy thing. Through doubting Thomas met his risen Lord. But I believe another title for Thomas explains his response better. For me Thomas was 'the Questioner'. Questioning is a good thing. We need to put claims that people make through a process of scrutiny. That way we can sort out the difference between wild ideas and the truth.

So what can we take from the story of Thomas' encounter with the risen Jesus to help us with the strange and difficult times we live in? I think we need to hold tight to the real attributes of Thomas, not his reputation as a doubter. We need to be realistic, searching, hopeful people who are not afraid to ask difficult questions. Above all we need to get to the place where we too can see with utter conviction, 'my Lord and my God'. Then we truly are Easter people and this is what Easter means to me.

Amen